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FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6310
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 000409

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STATE WHA/CAR FOR TILGHMAN INL/LP FOR BOZZOLO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/09/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV ASEC SOCI PINR KHUM KCOR JM XL
SUBJECT: JAMAICA: VETERAN OPPOSITION PARTY ORGANIZER
PREDICTS GENERAL ELECTIONS IN JULY; PM GOLDING AWAITS
DECISION OF APPEALS COURT BEFORE DETERMINING COURSE

REF: A. KINGSTON 245 (191809Z MAR 08)

1B. KINGSTON 364 (291558Z APR 08)
1C. 07 KINGSTON 1336 (042044Z SEP 07)
1D. KINGSTON 396 (061844Z MAY 08)

Classified By: Charge James T. Heg for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary and Analysis

11. (C) Dave Anderson, the former Special Advisor to ex-Minister of National Security Peter Phillips and a veteran People's National Party (PNP) political organizer:

(A) predicts that Prime Minister (PM) Bruce Golding will call a snap general election in July, and that his ruling Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) will pick up at least four more seats in Parliament -- after which he will reshuffle his Cabinet, to include naming a new Speaker of the House and Minister of National Security;

(B) confirms widely held suspicions that the opposition People's National Party (PNP) is in disarray (reftel A), and believes that Phillips, the PNP's number two, will wait until September or later to challenge Portia Simpson Miller (PSM) for leadership of the party.

2.(C) Because Golding cannot afford further erosion of the JLP's slim parliamentary majority, he effectively has drawn a line in the sand: whether Jamaica faces a series of by-elections in coming months or, alternatively, the PM calls a snap general election, may well depend on an impending ruling by the Appeals Court as to whether to award the contested Portland Western seat to a PNP candidate without (as directed by a lower court) holding a by-election (reftel B). Over a private luncheon on May 8, UK High Commissioner David Cresswell told Charge that senior JLP officials have told him that PM Golding has not yet made a decision regarding snap elections.

End Summary and Analysis.

Background on Anderson

13. (C) Anderson, who ran unsuccessfully for parliament as a PNP candidate years ago, remains active as a party organizer.

In addition to his former role as Special Advisor to the ex-Minister of National Security, Anderson acted as Phillips' campaign manager in last year's grueling fight between the PNP and JLP. Anderson now has left the Ministry, as the current Minister of National Security, Derrick Smith, considered him too political. Although removed from the Ministry's day-to-day activities, he keeps in close contact with the current Permanent Secretary Gilbert Scott, and with

his own successor, Errol Strong. Although PNP through and through, he also has good contacts within the JLP, and in the past his information about JLP strategy has been spot on. Anderson shared his views with NAS Director over a private luncheon on May 7.

Snap General Election?

14. (C) Anderson predicted a General Election in July. He believes that it is almost assured that the ruling JLP will win, and will pick up any seats that were decided in the last election by 200 or fewer votes, "with the exception of Peter Bunting's constituency." Bunting won't lose, according to Anderson, because he is too well organized and can finance his own race. For the rest of the PNP candidates, things don't look so promising. Anderson confirmed that the PNP is in disarray. The struggle for leadership of the party continued between ex-Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller and Phillips. Although Phillips' supporters are urging him to push Simpson Miller out of office before the next general election, Anderson thinks Phillips will continue to bide his time. According to Anderson, "if you are going to pick a fight like this one, you have to be sure that you will win." Despite its loss to the JLP in September 2007, and despite the fact that the PNP is viewed as being corrupt and ineffective at governing, Simpson Miller still has support among the PNP faithful. Phillips' calculus is to let Simpson Miller lose another election in July, and then take over the party in September 2008, at the next party congress. Phillips is in no hurry, says Anderson, because they both believe that the PNP will be out of power for at least two election cycles (i.e., a decade).

Cabinet Reshuffle after the next election Likely

15. (C) According to Anderson, Golding's Cabinet as originally planned looked very different from the current reality; key people the PM had wanted to turn to had lost their seats in the September, 2007 election. In the event, the Cabinet's configuration was the result of post-election dirty blackmail by Michael Henry, the current Minister of Transport and Works. According to Anderson, prior to last year's election, Henry had made a secret deal with the PNP to cross the aisle if there were a tie, which would have resulted in a PNP majority. When the JLP won by 32-28 seats (reftel C), Henry was "down but not out." After the dust settled and Golding was forming his government, he originally offered Henry the position of Speaker of the House. Henry refused, and formed an unholy alliance with Pearnel Charles (current Minister of Labor and Social Security) and Olivia "Babsy" Grange (current Minister of Information, Culture, Youth & Sports). They all went to Golding and threatened to cross the aisle unless they got ministerial-level positions. Golding was left with no choice but to appoint them to ministries, leaving the critical position of Speaker of the House open, which ended up going to Delroy Chuck. Anderson is sure that if Golding can win a more comfortable margin in the next election he will sweep Henry, Grange, and Charles out of the Cabinet and bring Chuck back as a Minister -- possibly Minister of National Security.

16. (C) Derrick Smith, the current Minister of National Security, has been out since April 7 (reftel D) recovering from surgery (to have several toes amputated after gangrene had set in as a complication of severe diabetes). Anderson believes that Golding will use the next election and Smith's failing health as grounds for shifting Smith from National Security to another less taxing ministry; Golding might ask Chuck to replace Smith.

Staff Changes underway at Ministry of National Security

17. (C) Anderson confirmed that the current Permanent Secretary (PS) of the Ministry of National Security, Gilbert

Scott, is leaving in November 2008 when his contract expires (reftel C). Scott, who wants to overlap at least three months with his successor, already is hand picking potential candidates for the Minister's consideration. The leading candidate for the job is Major Richard Reese, the Commissioner of Corrections. Anderson also knows that the position is coveted by Ann Marie Barnes, current Sr. Advisor for Policy. Barnes has stated that she plans to leave the Ministry in September (reftel C). Reese and Barnes do not get along, so his appointment would likely ensure her departure.

Analysis: Impending Appeals Court ruling may prove pivotal

8.(C) In the wake of a recent court ruling disqualifying JLP Member of Parliament (MP) for Portland Western Daryl Vaz, and the subsequent appeal of the court's ruling by the PNP runner-up Abe Dabdoub, who seeks to be awarded the seat without having to face a by-election (reftel B), PM Golding has gone on record as saying that he will not allow MPs to be seated solely as a result of court rulings -- implying that, if the Appeals Court rules in Dabdoub's favor, the PM then would be forced to call a snap general election. Because Golding cannot afford further erosion of the JLP's slim parliamentary majority, he effectively has drawn a line in the sand: whether Jamaica now faces a series of by-elections or, alternatively, a snap general election, may well depend on the impending ruling by the Appeals Court.

9.(C) If a snap general election is called, Anderson's prediction that the ruling JLP would gain those seats which had been won or lost by 200 or fewer votes in the 2007 election would amount to less than he seems to realize: only four (4) seats fall into that category, and Peter Bunting's Central Manchester seat (won by 207) is not among them. Eight (8) seats were won/lost by 900 or fewer votes, and post believes that these could go to either party. Good voter turn-out would favor the ruling JLP; conversely, voter fatigue and apathy would work to the advantage of the opposition PNP, which has a larger base of hard-core loyalists who will turn out to vote under any circumstances. Many observers, including University of the West Indies Sociologist Dr. Ian Boxhill, recently have alluded to the possibility of voter apathy, and predict a low turnout. Over

a private luncheon on May 8, UK High Commissioner David Cresswell told Charge that senior JLP officials had told him confidentially that PM Golding had not yet made a decision regarding a snap general election.

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